Telephone interview with Harry C. Smart, Marine wounded during Nevada Cities battles and treated aboard USS *Haven* (AH-12) during the Korean War. Conducted by Mr. Jan K. Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, 26 December 2001.

What unit were you with in Korea?
Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines.

What was your rank?
I was a PFC and a rifleman.

What year were in Korea?
1953.

Please describe what happened to you?

We had just come off line from Hill 229 which was overlooking Panmunjom where the peace talks were going on. We had been in reserve. It seemed like just a few days when the Chinese and North Koreans decided to make a push down through the valley. At the front of the valley was the Nevada Cities outposts of Reno, Vegas, and Carson. This was about the 25th of March. About the 27th we got called to reinforce the Nevada Cities. In the wee small hours of the 28th, we were sent out to reinforce Vegas, which had been overrun, retaken, overrun, and retaken. It was back and forth. The fighting was some of the fiercest during the Korean War. During this 5-day engagement, there were three Medals of Honor awarded, 11 Navy Crosses, and more Silver and Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts than you would want to count.

We had been up on line and the incoming from both sides was landing on one hill. That was our side shelling, their side shelling. On the 29th of March at about 0230 my luck ran out and I got hit with, I'm guessing, an 80mm mortar. It hit my right upper chest, blowing out some ribs, fracturing my pelvis, blowing it open to the bone. The projectile went through the right side and came out my stomach. My right boot was blown completely off and left shrapnel on the inside of the ankle.

I was then evacuated from the hill shortly thereafter. On the way down I had seen the South Korean people; we called them "chiggy-bearers." They'd run up and down those hills. They never stumbled, never tripped. But when they got me on the stretcher, all four of them tripped and we all went bucket over teakettle off the top of the hill.

So, in addition to the wounds, I now had all the rest of the aches and pains. They eventually got down there to me and got me back to the MLR. My first stop was at one of the aid stations. At that time, I thought my leg was gone. When they got me into the tent they asked how I was doing. I said, "I'm doing just great, but my feet are cold." I remember them elevating my feet up over the potbellied stove. I guess that should have been an indication that I still had both feet.

They treated me there and then put me on a helicopter--on the outside of one of the small ones--and transported me to one of the major med units. There they worked on me again. Eventually, they transported me inside a larger helicopter. I remember the doors. It was extremely warm. Again I lost consciousness.

I woke up, I don't know how many hours later, on what I realized was a hospital ship. As they were offloading me, I recall a corpsman or a doctor asking me how I was doing. I was in

pretty bad pain but I replied, "I'm doing just fine. Would you like to dance?" He chuckled and I chuckled and that's all I remember until I woke up in the ward.

I was hit on the 29th of March and woke up somewhere around the 3rd, 4th, or 5th of April. And that's when I met Bing. When I woke up they were loading me on a gurney. I said, "Where are we going?" One of the corpsmen said, "You're going back to surgery. We need to do some more work." And I said, "What kind of work are we going to do?" And he said, "Well, your right leg is of no value and they're going to have to amputate it." I said, "You mean I still have it?" He said yes. "Well, if I still have it," I said, "then I'm going to keep it."

A discussion ensued. About that time a Navy nurse came by and asked what the problem was. They told her we were ready to go to surgery, that I had regained consciousness, and was objecting to what was happening because my right leg was still there and I didn't want it taken off.

She went through the legalese to make sure I was awake and that I knew who I was. In a few minutes she told the corpsmen to put me back in the bunk, that I was not going back to surgery. And they said, "But the doctor said. . ." And she replied, "But I said he's not going to surgery!" The nurse was probably a lt.(j.g.) at that time but she dug her heels in and that was that. She then took care of me for about the next 2 or 3 weeks.

Do you remember what she did for you?

Just general care?

Changing dressings and that kind of thing?

The corpsmen did that but she supervised the medications. She was always there when somebody needed somebody to hold their hand. She always had time to stop and talk to the guys--the ones who had lost legs and arms. She was just incredible. I remember her professionalism and her caring.

And the only name you could recall all these years was Bing?

That's all I ever knew. I knew her name was Crosby but never knew her first name until just about a year ago.

There must have been physicians involved in taking care of you.

Yes, but I don't remember any of them. From what I understand, my initial surgery on the ship lasted about 10 hours. I was pretty well shot up. Over the next few years, I ran into a CDR [Wendell] Tiller. He did one or two surgeries on me. I think he was at Quantico. He was an outstanding surgeon. There was another one; I don't recall his name, and that's probably just as well. I told him I'd rather have a butcher work on me than him. I just wasn't impressed with him.

How long were you on the *Haven*?

I'm not really sure. I'm guessing probably 2 weeks. From there we sailed to Yokosuka.

What do you remember about the Naval Hospital in Yokosuka?

I had no complaints about any treatment. After they had gotten me up and moving, I had therapy. The wound on my hip was open all the way to the bone. It was bad. They would put me in the sitz bath. This one particular nurse was having a bad hair day. I was sitting down in the sitz bath and she came by and said, "How long have you been in there?" I said 4 or 5

minutes. "Well, it's time to get out." The drain was on the right side and this was where I had been hit. She reached down and pulled the stopper out and I thought it was going to suck all my insides out. I began hollering and the corpsman came and got me up out of there.

Nevertheless, I had a good stay at Yokosuka. I have nothing for admiration and praise for the Navy medical people. They're why I'm still here. It was a good experience.

Did they send you back to the States after that?

Yes. I flew from Yokosuka to Wake or Guam, and then went on to Tripler where I spent the night. From there I went to Travis Air Force Base in California, and then on to Mare Island where I spent 3 to 4 weeks. In between some of this, I was still having surgeries getting the shrapnel out. They were trying to locate me close to where my mother was, which was New York City.

After crossing the country I remember stopping at Chelsea Naval Hospital in Boston. I don't recall how long I was there. Eventually, I wound up at the naval hospital in St. Albans, New York. That's where I spent the rest of my time until I got out and returned to duty.

I was an outpatient while at the Brooklyn Navy Yard with the security detachment for a while.

Was your leg working okay by now?

It wasn't real good but at least I was off the crutches and I didn't have a cane. I was moving pretty good. But the hip was still open and it stayed open for several years. I still have a hole in it.

What was the actual injury?

The pelvis was fractured in two places and totally exposed. The back of my leg on the upper thigh looked like a hickory stick with the knots and stuff on it. You could feel it. They said that all the nerves had been damaged and would never function. But it has functioned now for about 48 years and I'm still fairly good. I have good and bad days but that's to be expected with longevity.

Even despite your injuries then, the Marines found you fit for duty?

Yes. I guess I was in good enough shape. I went through DI (drill instructor) school and was able to function. They told me that as time went on my leg would become worse and it has. I'm having more problems with it now. I'm on pretty heavy medication for pain but it's manageable.

Did you stay in the Marine Corps?

No, I didn't. I had planned to but the incident at Parris Island with the recruits . . . We just decided we wouldn't trust our luck. So we got out.

Was that the infamous drowning incident where several recruits died?

Yes. I missed being with that platoon by 1 day.

When did that happen?

April 7, 1956.

When did you get out of the Marines?
I got out on July 9th of '56.

How many years had you been in?
Four years. I was going to go 30 but that didn't work out.

What did you do after the Marine Corps?
I joined the San Antonio Police Department. I spent 38 years with the City of San Antonio and retired in 1998.

And do you still live in San Antonio?
Yes.

Could you tell me the story about how you found Bing again and what it was like to see her again after all these years?
Yes. About 4 or 5 years ago, the Military Order of the Purple Heart wanted to do a special issue of their magazine honoring medical personnel who took care of us. They solicited stories from veterans. I wrote a story about my situation and meeting Bing. At that time no one had ever heard of her; I certainly didn't know where she was. I submitted the article, and, believe it or not, it got published. I think this was in '95 or '96. A few years after that I read an article about a commander who was soliciting articles about Navy nurses during the Korean War. That was Commander [Frances] Omori. I sent a note to her and in a few weeks got a reply. It was a questionnaire. I filled it out and sent it back to her.

About 2 months after that the phone rang and the person asked for Sergeant Smart. I hadn't been Sergeant Smart in years. The voice on the other end said, "Harry? This is Commander Omori. Are you sitting down?"

"Should I be?"

"I think I've found Bing."

I was stunned and couldn't say a word. The fact that she had found someone I had been looking for for 48 years. . . We chatted and she gave me Bing's address and we began corresponding.

Last year I went to a Korean War veterans' reunion in Virginia Beach. I called Bing and asked her when would be a good time to visit her. So I left Virginia Beach and headed for Florida. On October 15, 2000 I rang the doorbell of her house. I'm not very good with words but I can tell you that we hugged and cried. It was incredible to find this lady who had saved my leg and my life so many years ago. I had no idea I would ever see her again.